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ABSTRACT

New Horizons is a course offered by the University of Edinburgh's Centre for Continuing Education that is aimed at first-time returners to education. In the 20 years since New Horizons was developed for women returners to education and/or employment, it has retained its original developmental outcomes but broadened its target group in response to changes in education and society. The program has remained a 1-day-per-week course, with students studying 3 subjects in the day with the same group of 20 students over 2 terms for 1-2 years. Although study skills and literature continue to be New Horizons' mainstay subjects, sociology, public affairs, art appreciation, science, music, and return to work or study have been added to the program. Although the teaching methods used in New Horizons classes have varied according to tutors' preferences/experiences, participation and discussion have always been emphasized. Each year, an optional residential conference/workshop has enabled participants to meet students in other New Horizons classes. Two surveys of former New Horizons students confirmed that New Horizons had restored their confidence and enabled them to make more informed choices for further progression into further/higher education and training, paid or voluntary work, or other equally rewarding, self-fulfilling endeavors. (MN)

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OCCASIONAL PAPERS SERIES: NO 7

NEW HORIZONS 20 YEARS ON

MARGARET GORDON

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New Horizons

20 years on

Margaret Gordon

FOREWORD

Margaret Gordon's paper marks the 20th anniversary of a programme of courses aptly named 'New Horizons', and celebrates its success. A past participant in New Horizons, the author now organises the programme, and as such, manages to achieve the delicate balance between offering students support/guidance and promoting self-determination.

As summarised in the paper, Gordon's research indicates that the **ability to choose** how far they will match themselves against 'the expectations of authority figures' is welcomed by the vast majority of students, and it seems as if many come on the course precisely for the opportunity to practice this skill. Providers and policy makers, Gordon argues, should not assume that all learners come equipped with 'long-term goals' or can acquire these easily. Like decision making, goal setting is a skill in itself.

Gordon highlights this difficulty when she claims that 'personal development is not a legitimate subject - that is, not one that can be "taught"'. Perhaps one could argue that while the knowledge underpinning transferable skills **can** be taught, learned and assessed, assessing applied skills in this area is often not only undesirable but virtually impossible. The growing demand amongst employers for proven ability in a wide range of transferable skills suggests that highly enabling courses for first time returners such as New Horizons should be given credit (metaphorically at least) by a vocationally-oriented Department of Education.

Not only does this paper indicate the current value of such courses, it is able to draw on data gathered in 1986 and 1990 tracking students from 1980 onwards - a rare opportunity for retrospective reflection on the aims and methods of a programme and its outcomes. The process continues as past participants gather soon for an event celebrating 20 years of New Horizons, having been sent (along with their invitation) a questionnaire requesting information on their experiences on the course and their activities afterwards.

Anne Marie Bostyn (on behalf of the Editorial Committee)

MARGARET GORDON

Having brought up a family of four Margaret Gordon became an adult returner to education herself in 1978 when she joined the third course of the New Horizons programme. In 1980 she began study with the Open University obtaining an Honours Degree in Psychology in 1985. While studying she worked as a tutor on New Horizons, taking over as Course Coordinator from Mona McDonald in 1986. She gained a Certificate in Human Relations and Counselling in 1984 and worked as a private counsellor. She teaches Transactional Analysis on the CCE Open Studies programme and continues her own learning in this field.

NEW HORIZONS
20 YEARS ON

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 1996 we will be celebrating our 20th year of New Horizons.

New Horizons is a course, run by the Centre for Continuing Education at the University of Edinburgh. It is aimed at first time returners to education and is intended as an encouragement to adults who have reached a stage in their lives:

- where they feel an urge to do something different
- are not sure what it is they want to do
- are not sure how to go about finding out what they want
- and are not sure if they are capable of doing anything.

It belonged originally to the family of 'fresh start' courses which grew up and flourished in the 60's and 70's aimed particularly at women returners to education and/or employment, and was one of the first such courses in Scotland. In the years since its conception classes have increased from one to seven and student numbers from 20 to approximately 120. The target group has widened in response to changes in education and more generally to changes in society, but the original developmental outcomes have remained constant.

This paper is in part a retrospective using material gathered at various times and for various reasons over those years, and in part a preparation for the anniversary celebration. It is also an attempt to put the course in the wider context of the imminent changes to adult and continuing education within the University of Edinburgh, and in Scotland. To do this we will look at the historical background of the course, its basic structure, what it has provided in the way of outcomes for its students, and how it has developed. From the results of two previous studies - a tenth anniversary study, and one of a cohort of students ten years after their participation - we will also consider some of the unplanned and often unforeseen developmental outcomes, both institutional and personal.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

New Horizons was first introduced in 1976 as part of the Edinburgh University Extra Mural Department programme. Its initial success was described by Mona McDonald who started the course, as 'a phenomenon of the 70's' (1), and by Basil Skinner, the then Director of the Department, as 'an innovative programme reflecting both awareness of changing community needs in education and a readiness within the Department to experiment with new provision' (2). That 'phenomenon' has continued to be a success throughout the 80's and the 90's, has continued to reflect and respond to changes, and is now facing new challenges.

In her paper, published in the Scottish Journal of Adult Education 1978(1), Mona speaks of three basic models considered when planning the course, based on similar courses run in London's City Literary Institute; the Centre Retravail, Paris; and Newcastle University's Extra Mural Department:

- short term courses focusing sharply on 'back to work', catering for women whose specific purpose is to gain confidence and sharpening of wits' to enter or re- enter employment
- another largely focused upon liberal studies
- and a third falling somewhere in between these in that it is both liberal, educational and vocational, consisting of academic study, study skills and reorientation or vocational guidance, with the focus on the subject areas of the course, firstly as a medium of systematic reading, discussion and writing at a level of some sophistication, and secondly as a means of disciplining the mind irrespective of the subject content of the session.

When she devised a model to be used in Edinburgh she chose the third model as one which would provide 'an integral experience in which there is no clear cut distinction between the academic and the vocational components'. But she also states that she 'did not know what the students planned'. Over the 20 years of its existence approximately 2000 students have followed this model with suggested changes considered, tried where possible, evaluated and then either adopted or rejected. But the basic model has remained close to the original.

Within the first two years of the course Mona identified what it was providing for the students based on initial objectives and student and tutor feedback. The following is a slightly adapted summary of that provision which has remained true over the 20 years:

- A forum, a clearing house for the individual to assess the future along with others, without needing prior qualifications to enter, or facing examination hurdles on exit.

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- Subject matter in which students can begin to find the confidence of "knowing about" a particular field and making an assessment of their potential in learning
- A medium for understanding twentieth century society, to begin to be able to talk about its problems, influence it, take part in it, manage certain aspects of it better
- A place to discuss new opportunities, and further avenues for learning, training or work.
- A way of overcoming old blocks and old failures inside the educational system.
- Stimulation for new interests, perhaps in unexpected areas.
- A "day or evening's work" which requires facing challenge, the discipline of imposed time-keeping and project making activities.
- An environment where trust between members grows, and deepens their learning.
- A "jumping off place" where one can learn how to learn and take that ability on to other fields.
- A valid and worthwhile form of learning in itself from which to seek more.

COURSE FORMAT

The general aim of the course was 'to help students gain new horizons and establish long term goals based on their individual interests, abilities and aspirations'. Although this has remained constant, experience and research, specifically our 10 Year Study (8), has suggested that 'long term goals' may be a concept of more relevance to the providers than to the students. Educational providers have had a tendency to make assumptions about adult returners, leading to inappropriate expectations of students. More will be said on this when we look at the results of our second study.

People came to the course, generally speaking, when they had reached a stage in their lives when they wanted to do something but were not sure what they wanted to do or if they were capable of doing anything. In many cases there was even a hesitation about the idea of going back to learning itself. No qualification was needed for entry and none was given on exit, allowing emphasis on learning for enjoyment with encouragement from tutors and fellow students, rather than the pressure of exams or the expectations of authority figures. The absence of any pressure at this point has been, consistently, one of the issues most commented on by the students - for most favourably, although with reservations for a few.

Although open to anyone over 21, and not specifically aimed at women, the majority of applicants have been women within the 30 - 50 age band with a wide range of educational backgrounds, but also with enough confidence to approach a University department. This to some extent has made the group self-selecting with regard to social

background, despite efforts to widen the social intake. Various attempts at outreach work over the twenty years have resulted in limited success although this work continues. Courses have been run at Firhill, Penicuik, Craigroyston, and currently at Musselburgh.

The basic form of the course has remained fairly constant with students attending one day a week from 9.45 am - 3.15 pm to fit in with school hours, and studying three subjects in the day with the same group of twenty students over a period of two terms, one year or two years. Being with the same group throughout the day results in a lot of learning taking place informally within the group. Many support and friendship groups are formed and continue long after the course has ended.

More recently, in an attempt to attract more men to the course, an evening group was introduced. This had to be increased to two classes because of demand but interestingly, although certainly attracting more men than the day time course, it was now also appealing to working women thinking about a possible career change, and to 'carers' unable to attend day classes because of their commitments. How to attract men on to the course has been an ongoing challenge since the early years when suggestions were made for a different kind of course that might be more appealing. This did not come to fruition but more recent years have shown a gradual but steady increase in the number of men attending, with the reported outcomes being the same for the men as for the women. 1994/95 session saw our first class with more men than women participating.

Subjects have varied over the years but the mainstays have continued to be Study Skills and Literature. Although an original programme cannot be confirmed it seems to have included in addition to these, Sociology, Public Affairs, Art Appreciation, Science, Music and Return to Work or Study. Students study three subjects in recognised disciplines, a typical day consisting of Study Skills, Modern Literature and Social Studies. But although the subject content of the course is in recognised disciplines, the selection of subjects is made with two things in mind - their relevance to our particular students, and how successfully our students can relate to them - "relevance and relatedness". In a course that aims to encourage participation and to build self confidence, perceived relevance and relatedness are essential and valuable aspects of the programme, encouraging students to bring their own life experience to the learning process and to relate their new learning to the wider society outside. This is reflected in the diversity of outcomes reported by past students.

Alan Rogers, in his paper Evaluation, Adult Education and Development (3), puts a case for developmental adult education where he says:

> *"... it is the attitudes of the local community towards the programme which determine its effectiveness - not whether we teach well but whether people feel that they can learn and change and develop through our programmes. The value of our programmes can perhaps best be seen through their belief in the programmes and its outcomes."*

I would suggest that the 'community' in the case of New Horizons is a group of diverse people at the same psychological stage in their lives, and that the community need or aspiration is to develop the self confidence and self esteem to identify and use the potential they have in an appropriate field chosen by them.

The basic philosophy then, has been and still is more student-centred than subject-centred, and as such differs from the more subject-based courses offered in the Centre's general Open Studies programme and by other educational providers. Although students are learning about subjects in recognised disciplines they are also set on a road of exploration and discovery. In following the programme over two terms with an optional third term, the students learn how to learn; they regain lost confidence; they find out more about themselves in relation to others within the structures and values of modern society; they are more able to recognise and deal with their own particular blocks to learning, and hopefully by the end of the course they have a clearer idea of what they want to do and what their capabilities are. Home reading, written work and project work are encouraged though they are not obligatory, and constructive criticism is given by the subject tutors when requested. This has resulted in the responsibility of learning being left in the ownership of the individual students. They set their own goals and assess their own achievements.

> *"... a student, fulfilling a session's challenge in the way of reading, writing essays, attending lectures, tutorials, taking part in discussion, and attempting some creative work, finds that it can represent quite an achievement in terms of determination, ability and concentration, although those who do not want to use the year so strenuously are not under compulsion to do so."(4)*

Relevant to current changes in education Alan Rogers(3) poses the question of how measures of achievement can allow for individual learners setting and achieving their own goals and suggests the answer could be a developmental model of adult education where the main objective of the programme would be to meet a community need or aspiration and the attaining of individual learners' goals would be 'other outcomes', 'by-products', not the primary programme objective. It could be argued, however that the achievement of the primary programme objective for New Horizons is inseparable from the personal assessment of 'other outcomes' for individuals, and the unforeseen 'by products' for the institution and for the wider community. We will return to this with examples from our two studies.

METHODS

Methods of teaching have varied according to individual tutor's preference and experience, but the aim is always towards participation and discussion, with lectures only rarely used. Student feedback on styles and methods of teaching has been encouraged, responded to, and the course adapted accordingly from the start. Tutors are selected with this in mind.

All tutors are chosen as far as possible for their knowledge and skill in the theory and practice of adult and community education. Regular staff meetings are held to discuss group and individual progress as well as acting as a forum for tutor development and discussion. This has led to a certain spirit of co-operation where it is recognised that the value of the course is more than the sum of its separate parts i.e. the work of individual tutors. An essential part of being a tutor on New Horizons is the recognition of the importance of this aspect. Over the years several of our former students have been attracted back to the course to teach with us - 'recycled learners'. These are mainly students who have gone on to gain educational qualifications in different fields but have been drawn back to the work of adult education with a view to encouraging others through the example of their own experience. By using former students as tutors we offer a model for current students and a guarantee that tutors will be able to empathise with them in all aspects of returning to learning. One current tutor wrote in her "Essay on Empowerment" submitted for a Community Education Diploma/M. Sc Course 1990 (5)

> *"The experience of being a New Horizons student is life-enhancing and empowering in a way which no other educational experience seems to be able to match. I say this out of my own involvement as participant, as co-learner with others and as a tutor."*

Currently we have seven former students teaching with us.

RESIDENTIAL WEEKEND

As an integral part of the programme an optional residential conference/workshop has been offered each year, providing the opportunity to meet students attending other New Horizons classes. From the early 80's this has been held at Newbattle Abbey College and although only about a quarter of each year's students attend this it has proved to be a memorable and significant learning experience for most, with particular aspects reported years later by individual participants. There have also been many unplanned and unforeseen outcomes for some participants as shown by the following examples.

One session is devoted to a panel of former students talking about what they have done since completing the course. One panel member who had come to New Horizons

having been forced, very reluctantly, to take early retirement, gave a presentation on the joys of coming back to learning and the new worlds it had opened up for him. He was asked by one of the students present if he would give a series of talks to pre-retirement groups in her place of work and now does so on a regular basis for her and for other organisations.

The second involved a conversation between three students attending different NH classes discussing unfulfilled dreams/ambitions. Two expressed a wish that they had learned to play the piano when young and the third recommended a Suzuki music teacher. The two went on to learn with that particular teacher, and continue to develop their skills after four years. *'A new world of pure joy.'*

3. COURSE DEVELOPMENT

The course has "grown like Topsy".

Mona McDonald (4) writing on the second year's operation of the NH programme - a new Extra-Mural project providing a re-entry to education - says that:

> *"... one of the characteristics of the courses at present appears to be that they grow like Topsy. The basic mixture seems to work, but one of the primary tasks is that of meeting needs as they appear... "*

These needs have been met on an individual level and on an institutional level.

The task of meeting needs has been approached on an individual level by the provision of pre-course and on-course guidance/counselling , but it has also been seen as part of the general ethos of the course. Tutors identifying individual or group needs have brought these to the regular staff meetings for discussion and plans developed to help satisfy these needs. Examples of such developments which were short-lived may be found in particular subjects such as New Maths., Information Technology, Creative Writing , or in particular methods of attending such as one subject on each day. These were tried, evaluated and rejected for this particular course although all students expressing a need in these areas were offered guidance on an alternative route. The tried and rejected developments however are balanced by the following successful ones.

It was noticed that once students regained confidence, their paths began to diverge. Very early in the course some students were ready and willing to take on a more concentrated commitment with a view to returning to work or formal study. Women returners who initially needed to regain confidence, lost or diminished over the years of bringing up a family, found their confidence and were eager to get back into the job market either immediately or after a period spent in training or further education. Once this particular need was identified, New Horizons was fortunate in having a tutor with all the skills necessary to develop a course to suit that particular group and the first Wider Opportunities for Women course took place in 1980 under the leadership of Val Wilson. This proved itself to be a very successful course helping many women to make informed choices about their next step in the world of employment. Although the funding for this course came to an end in 1988 a similar course was set up in the same year and is currently run under the Returning to Learning section as Returning to Work or Study.

Some found that now they wanted some sort of proof of their capabilities that would be recognised by the outside world. Although their tutors believed them capable of further

or higher education they still wanted or needed to prove it to themselves and/or their families by a more traditional route. They didn't want to go back to "school" for a variety of reasons but learning in an "adult" world with other "adults" was more attractive. New Horizons had a tutor with the enthusiasm and expertise to develop these with our students in mind, and certificate courses were introduced providing the opportunity to study for Highers or A Levels either as an end in themselves or as a step to University or College entrance. These courses were held in the Extra-Mural Department maintaining a "*safe and familiar environment for that next step*" under the leadership of Mike Ridings. They continued until 1988, run in conjunction with Stevenson College of Further Education, a link which was to be developed and strengthened further in 1988 when the first Access course was introduced at the Centre.

Students taking the new Access route were hungry for academic qualifications. University was their immediate goal. There was a feeling amongst some in the Centre that the advent of the Access course would result in a fall in demand for New Horizons and would therefore supersede it. The assumption made by the providers in this case was that a qualification was what the students wanted and needed, and that there was some uniformity of goals which we could now provide. The continuing demand for a more gentle return to learning has demonstrated the need for both types of provision with many, including one current NH tutor who was on the first Access course, making the transition from NH to Access without that being their original aim.

> *"New Horizons was the initial stepping stone. Without it I doubt whether I would have taken to study and been so committed. NH gave me the opportunity to meet others who were also about to take their first tentative steps into the 'unknown'. I have now come full circle and am still getting the same 'buzz' from New Horizons".*

From end of year feedback we learned that a good number of students, although their confidence had been regained, preferred to continue their personal learning within the structure they had become accustomed to and without pressure. Paper qualifications were not regarded as a necessary part of their learning. For these continuing students we developed interdisciplinary "study days" where students studied a period or a theme from a perspective of three related disciplines, for example, the Art, Literature and the Music of the Rococo to Romanticism period. This format eventually became so popular with continuing New Horizons students and with other Open Studies students that it became a regular feature of the Open Studies programme.

Another slightly different path was taken by some in the above group. They chose to form their own "learning cells" and organise their own programmes outwith the Department, but with the moral support and encouragement of New Horizons tutors. This continues to happen with some groups particularly in the area of literature and creative writing.

One short-lived but no less valuable initiative developed by former students was the setting up of the New Horizons Association of Former Students in 1988. It was thought that a social, educational, cultural network would be attractive and useful to former students. For approximately 3 years the Association provided that network producing a regular newsletter for the members. Unfortunately, as often happens, the organisation and administration fell to a willing few - until they were no longer willing or able to continue. All who had participated however found that they had developed new contacts and/or skills in doing so and therefore valued the experience. (Original copies of the newsletters are available).

Within the security of the New Horizons environment, a few students each year were able to recognise some basic English needs and a close liaison developed with the University Settlement's "2nd Chance to Learn" course. This link has grown stronger over the years with two way movement between the courses supported and encouraged when appropriate.

As a means of facilitating progression many other links have been made with educational providers and with other agencies. The importance of such interagency links was recognised within Edinburgh in the 80's and the setting up of a Lothian Adult Guidance Network, first informal, now well established, has provided and still provides a valuable resource for us in our guidance work with the students. There is widespread consensus on the value of adult guidance and the central role it plays in education and training.

> *"Effective guidance offered by trained practitioners has proved crucial in encouraging adults to return to learning, in assisting them throughout their period of study and in helping them to progress to further education, training or employment options".*(6)

With this aspect in mind the most recent development within the course has been the introduction of two options for students in their third term. One is a career guidance option using the the integrated 'Stepping Stones' programme encouraging participants to evaluate their present situation and to consider their skills and resources. The second is aimed at those who may be thinking about a degree course but may want to explore the idea more fully.

Finally, in the area of institutional development, New Horizons is now part of a Returning to Learning Section within the Centre for Continuing Education. This includes four courses with a common philosophy and ethos, formed to build on the work already done by individual course co-ordinators in development, transition and provision of guidance in these and other areas.

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4. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND PROGRESSION

FINDINGS FROM THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY STUDY 1985

So far we have talked about development in terms of identifiable groups and common goals thrown up in the process of confidence building, widening experience, and information gathering. But what of the outcomes on a more individual level? To get some idea of these we turn to our two studies, the first done in 1986 on the occasion of the 10th Anniversary of the course and the second in 1990 looking at a cohort of students from 1980.

No formal procedures were in place for tracking the progression routes of students but it was felt that an informal survey after 10 years might give us some idea of the paths followed by those we were able to contact. A questionnaire was sent to approximately 600 former New Horizons students asking what they felt they had gained from the course and what paths they had taken on completing the course. From a response of approximately 200 (a very high response considering the high mobility of our particular students), we learned of some of the perceived benefits and outcomes.

From the quantitative data collected:

- 57% had gone on to some form of further or higher education and/or training
- 69% spoke of having gone on to full-time, part-time or voluntary work
- 17% spoke of having followed other paths, many not involving work or education/training but perceived nevertheless as equally rewarding and self-fulfilling.

With regard to the more qualitative data here are some examples of answers to questions posed.

"Can you specify briefly what you feel New Horizons did for you ?"

- stimulated intellectually
- opened up new interests
- confidence to get back to work
- confidence in my academic abilities
- realised I was capable of studying again
- made me feel more independent
- helped me feel my intellectual capabilities were still intact
- made learning and the discovery of new skills rewarding and exciting
- restored confidence
- improved concentration
- made me aware of latent talents

Can you give us a brief indication of your pathway since finishing the course?"

- Write weekly column for local paper - local correspondent for Courier. Freelance writing, agriculture course.
- Started own business - fashion - employ 5 people.
- Scottish centre for tuition of disabled - at University Settlement now Stevenson College, enjoy immensely.
- Fashion designing - exhibiting. Opened small shop.
- Flexi study at Telford - partly for "O" Level.
- Part-time library assistant - Napier - then got SCOTVEC Certificate in Library and Information Science (top student) now completing the Higher Certificate and started O.U. foundation course - all still on the job.
- Back to the house but with a more open mind.
- Getting novel (light romantic) published and 2 more being considered - short stories and 2 radio plays.
- Greater interest in life and literature.
- Writing poetry and curling.
- Volunteer for Family Care - typing.

From this selection of responses it may be seen that once confidence was regained students paths diverged, but most if not all were able to make more informed choices for the next step and for further progression as time passed. Looking at these outcomes it is difficult to imagine these as clear-cut goals that the students had when they started the course. Our second study attempted to look at this aspect.

FINDINGS FROM THE CLASS OF '80 STUDY

In 1990, with the proliferation of courses for adult returners over the previous decade - enticing adults back to learning, encouraging women back to education and training, inviting people to think of learning as a life long activity - it seemed like a good time to look at New Horizons as one of the early pioneers in the field of courses for first time returners. There also appeared to be an absence of longitudinal studies in this area. It was decided therefore that by looking at a cohort of students from 1979/80 we might get some idea of the effects of such a course over a period of time. What paths had each student in that particular group followed ? What were the outcomes for them, positive or negative ? What happened to them in the intervening years ? How had the course affected their lives, if at all? It was also hoped that issues relevant to current and future theory and practice in Adult Education might be identified from the results.

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Methodology

As records of students attending that particular year had been kept, 50 of the 52 on record were contacted, (the 2 omitted being two of our researchers), and a final 23 took part in the study.

A brief questionnaire based on the one used in the 10th Anniversary Survey was used with follow-up interviews with two men and nineteen women. Data was recorded on the student's background, initial introduction to the course, student's expectations and the expectations and reactions of others, memories of the course itself, paths followed since finishing, and thoughts and feelings looking back.
We started with the question:

> ***'If the aim of New Horizons was to help students gain new horizons and establish long term goals based on their individual interests, abilities, and aspirations, had this been achieved?'***

The results of the study showed that at least part of the aim was achieved in the majority of cases but possibly not in ways envisaged by the original planners. New and often very unexpected horizons had been reached but the establishment of long term goals was not as clear cut as had been expected.

When questioned on their expectations few had any clear goals in mind and different interpretations of what was meant by expectations emerged:

- **Initial expectations of the course –**
  "It was the first time I'd gone off and done something by myself, without children, without husband... and you find it quite frightening to be judged as an individual again"
- **Short term goals –**
  "I wanted something for myself... a chance to oil the brain and start thinking again"
- **Tutors expectations of them.** Mention was made by one or two of too high expectations by some tutors and too low by others. Mention was also made of being expected to go on to higher education by some tutors and to go on to a job by others.

For those who had reached a reasonable standard at school and perhaps at college or university, the general expectation was that it would provide the "kickstart" to re-activate a rusty brain.To these students it was seen as a stepping off point for further study and/or work opportunitiy. For those who had been forced by family circumstances, financial or medical, to leave school at an early age it was seen as an opportunity *to begin a learning process* which had been denied them in the past. But the idea of having long term goals or expectations

did not seem to figure in their responses. However, with a very few exceptions who felt that the course did not come up to their intellectual standards, the majority felt that it had lived up to its name. It had provided *"the basic material to start rethinking personal change."* When we came to look at the paths followed by the cohort we found an amazing diversity with outcomes not foreseen by the students at the start of the course.

Of the 21 interviewed 15 went on to some form of further study or training, *but not all immediately after completing the course.* There seemed to be a need for some to spend time "back home" for different reasons.

For one student who returned to the family business there was a feeling that her husband needed her there. *"I didn't have the courage to break away - there was a big pull back to the family."* She also had an elderly mother at home requiring care and this added to the pull back. Subsequently however, she studied Italian, Assertiveness, Psychology and Counselling. For another the feeling was expressed that it was *"important to be home at least part of the day for the children at that stage in their lives"* although she emphasised that this was a positive choice for which she had no regrets. Such choices, by these and others, seemed to be based on a sense of *"knowing when the time was right for me".*

For others, financial circumstances meant that getting a job took top priority over continuing with their learning. One felt she had to get a job to pay school fees for her dyslexic child when she completed the course but later went on to study French for enjoyment and Computing to gain skills to use in her serious hobby of family history.

The most popular follow-up course taken was Highers or A levels in English and/or History but five chose to study a foreign language, French or Italian, one to Honours Degree level and another taking the Interpreter's Certificate and continuing to attend University classes although feeling "too old" to take the language to degree level. This student did however achieve a BA Degree with the Open University as did one of the over 50 interviewees. For one student it was a desire to study which motivated him; for another it was the "joy of learning" and the sense of achievement for someone who was as she says *"so embarrassed about leaving school at 14 that I usually add a year or two when filling in forms".*

Another began a post graduate Diploma with the Open University but transferred to Stirling University to do a Social Work qualification. For her the experience was more of an exploration of where her interests and abilities really lay. Having been involved in education as an organiser/provider for the 10 years after finishing New Horizons she felt the time was right to move on to a different field. Two students completed degrees at Edinburgh University, one in languages and one in Sociology, while a third obtained a BA Degree in Business Studies from Napier College of Higher Education via Telford College of Further Education.

Home circumstances and personal interests influenced other students. Two did Counselling Training, with the Samaritans and with the Scottish Association of Counselling, by way of

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Psychology and Assertiveness courses in the Extra Mural Programme, Adult Literacy work, and a Counselling Course at Moray House College. Another went on to a Floristry course at Telford College helping her in her work in the family nursery garden business. And lastly one trained to teach at the Rudolph Steiner School which her children attended.

There would seem therefore from this to be no natural progression from New Horizons through the educational system. Each student moved on at his or her own pace and according to personal circumstances still exploring different paths but with more confidence - confidence to stop and turn back when appropriate or to cut across to other paths which appeared more inviting.

Similarly, in the area of employment, there seemed to be no direct route from New Horizons to an employment goal. Two had returned to their family businesses, market gardening and picture framimg. One had moved from running a day centre for the elderly handicapped to opening a small business with a coffee shop attached. This became so all consumimg for her that her husband gave up his business to join her and at the time of the study they employed three assistants. Other jobs mentioned included full time nursing with the University Health Centre, free-lance language teaching, school assistant and an occasional interpreter in court.

An opportunity presented itself to one student during the course which she described as *"a perfect job"* - helping a former New Horizons student to set up the Scottish Centre for the Tuition of the Disabled spawned by Edinburgh University Settlement. This she did for 10 years, also representing the organisation on Lothian Region Continuing Education Committee.

It's interesting to note that this was the forerunner of the current organisation called Linking Education And Disability (LEAD) which now runs the Housebound Learners Scheme in conjunction with CCE.

Another project set up by one of our cohort was the Bridges Project for young homeless in Edinburgh.

In the business world one student had become a stock-controller with a furniture firm having built up her experience in part time jobs and developed computer skills,while another became a Business Analyst with the Bank of Scotland, having worked through Market Research and various computer courses to get there although certainly not having that in mind when she started.

In the voluntary sector, jobs mentioned included work with CAB including involvement in training of new volunteers, counselling with charities, Adult Literacy teaching, Simpson's Hospital Playgroup and Riding for the Disabled. Lastly one student helped to found the Scottish Down's Syndrome Association and was a member of the working party on the needs for the elderly with learning difficulties, taking groups of retired mentally handicapped people out on a regular basis. This particular student recalled an occasion in the Literature class which was to have a great significance for her. The tutor had read a moving poem

about a Down's Syndrome child. *"He didn't know I had one but everyone else did. The discussion seemed to bring me right into the group, everyone being supportive and interested. I felt noticably more confident after that."*

Other outcomes referred to included active political work, published articles and a broadcast short story.

As was said earlier the idea of long term goals and achievement in these terms seemed to be more a part of the "frame of reference" of particular tutors than of the students. The former in some cases, as interpreted by the students, had a progression route mapped out for them , either into further or higher education or into work, and were sometimes "disappointed that we didn't live up to their expectations of us". One student spoke of her discomfort in the second term when job interviews were included in a class and she realised that that was not what she wanted at that time.

What I needed was to know that I could do something eventually, pick up my career again - but not yet. New Horizons was a satisfying experience in itself without making me feel I had to go out and get a job then. It was just wonderful to be with other people, to hear ideas, to discuss things that I'd no opportunity to discuss with anybody else - not even my husband.

But the students themselves seemed to see their progression in terms of personal development, personal outcomes, or just paths followed. This discovery was I think behind Mona McDonald's comment on not knowing what the students had planned for the course.

ISSUES ARISING FROM THE STUDY

Three particular issues which arose from the study have affected our more recent planning and would seem to be relevant to the current climate and imminent changes in adult education in general. These relate to the concept of *goals*, to *time and sequence* with regard to progression, and to *age*.

There seemed and still seems to be an assumption that starting with a 'goal' or the gradual establishment of a 'goal', is a necessary requisite for adults returning to learning. The difficulty here, as will be endorsed by anyone working in the field of career/educational guidance, is that first time returners seldom have clear goals, or else they present goals which are either impractical, unattainable, confused or based on insufficient knowledge or experience, and yet are seen by them as a necessary requisite for approaching any sort of advice centre or learning institution. In a recent study Progression Opportunities for Adult Learners (6), three broad categories of adult learners were identified, the largest group being those 'who are uncertain about their goals or how to achieve them.' It was found that:

> *"providers and practitioners alike stressed the importance of progression in terms of* ***personal development*** *for adults who are uncertain about their goals and how to achieve them."*
> (My emphasis)

But personal development is not a legitimate subject - that is, it is not one that can be 'taught', nor is it one that the general public would recognise. It is a process. New Horizons has from its inception addressed exactly that group, its publicity speaking of people who have reached a stage in their lives when they "want to do something, are not sure what or if they are able to do anything". At that stage what do they do ? If the want is strong enough they will translate it into something that is already within their experience, their 'frame of reference'. They may have a child doing GCSE and think "I'd like to do that". They may remember a favourite history teacher and think I'd like to learn History again. They may have skills unused for years that they would like to brush up on. They may feel that getting any job is the way to go.

In the 80's there was a tendency for providers, faced with such a prospective student, to be tempted to offer a selection of possible goals - usually related to the provision of the institution approached - for the client to choose from. As in many cases this method has satisfactory outcomes, such a 'provider-centred' approach was seldom questioned. In the current market-led climate there seems to be a resurgence of this approach with some unfortunate consequences.

Our study seemed to indicate that for the 'unsure' a more 'person-centred' approach is needed. By failing to see and feel from a client's perspective and by providing goals for them to select from, we may have been limiting their choice instead of widening it,

particularly in the delicate, early stages of returning to learning.

If, then, first time returners do not have clear cut goals, what is it they are looking for when they approach educational providers? The study - and the experience of New Horizons itself - would seem to suggest that for a large number of adults the goals, although difficult to formulate at the early stage, are to find out who they are, ie. to reassess their 'self image'; to find out what they can do, ie build up their 'self esteem'; and then to follow their self chosen path with more confidence. The term 'goals' therefore, is perhaps inappropriate as it implies an 'end'. From our study it would seem that it was the travelling, the moving on with confidence that provided the new horizons and not the achievement of an end. Each path taken led to another, with a sense of fulfilment at each stage but also with a new sense of "self" and a will to continue with the journey. Even those in our study who, when interviewed, were in full time employment, still continued their learning or expressed a desire to do so. The terms "continuing education" and "life-long learning" imply an ongoing process which would seem to be exemplified by this cohort of adults.

This takes us to the second issue of relevance to current changes in the field of education.The assumption, made by many providers, of a steady progression through the educational system was also called into question by the findings of the study. Whether the first step back was seen as:

- a starting off point
- a springboard
- a stepping stone
- a life-line
- a kick start

or just

- an opening of doors

would seem to have some influence on the speed, the direction, the motivational strength and the consistency of progression or even exploration. What did not seem to have as much influence as we had expected was time taken and a third factor - age.

With regard to the time factor, although a sense of urgency was perceived as emanating from at least some of the tutors, the long-term picture derived from the study was of individuals not being bound by time or pressurised by perceived lack of time, but actually taking their own time to make their own choices when circumstances were 'right' for them. They developed the confidence to decide for themselves which path to choose, when, and to change direction according to other circumstances.

Getting back to work or study was not the be all and end all - just getting more confident was important, confident enough to look for stimulating work that would use my intelligence when the time was right.

That was one of the great things about New Horizons, you weren't pushed into things but became more aware of and open to opportunities. This was seen in retrospect as the start of confidence rebuilding when you felt you wanted to say something in a discussion and did actually say it, instead of sitting quiet.

Many commented on the fact that they now felt they could go on to do something else with added provisos:

- if I apply myself
- if I decide to pick up my career again
- if I want to do something different with my life.

The *feeling that they could when when it suited them* proved to be a marvellous confidence booster. This finding was echoed in the study Progression Opportunities for Adult Learners(6) where it was stated that pace was important, and that:

> *"allowance should be made for sideways movement between courses and even in and out of institutions at different stages of personal development"*

It would seem therefore that the concepts of time and progression sequence are as relevant now in the current climate as they were at the time of our study.

Age on the other hand seemed to be relevant almost in its irrelevance in our study. Although we had 10 from the 30+ age group, 7 from 40+, 3 from the 50+ and 1 from the 60+, there was no path followed more by one age group than another. A significant quote from the interviewer of the only 60+ student interviewed was:

J is a young active enthusiastic 71 year old - a great advertisement for the course. Her expectations relative to those of others interviewed were lower. *"Here's another course I can do."* She didn't expect it to transform her but it did.

The conclusion of this study seemed to show that the outcome of a course such as this is certainly to provide new horizons for any age, but the changes experienced are not so much in the sense of the achievement of finite and clear-cut goals, as in the growth of self-confidence, in perceived personal development, in changing perspectives on life, and increasing clarity of objectives, with each new horizon revealing another waiting to be explored.

5. CONCLUSION

In 1996 New Horizons celebrates 20 years of introducing adults to the idea of learning as a lifelong occupation - enjoyable, stimulating, fulfilling in itself and a key which can, as one student put it, *"open a Pandora's Box of opportunities"* when and if they wish to use it. The information which is being collected from former students as part of the anniversary celebration will give us some idea of the long term outcomes of the course and to what extent these are attributed directly or indirectly to their participation on it.

With the imminent and crucial changes to adult and continuing education, where certification seems to be considered paramount, and immediate and quantifiable outcomes are the norm for the future, the challenge we now face is twofold.

- **Is it possible or desirable to adapt a course such as this which has proved its value over 20 years, to the rigid, constrained formula apparently expected for financial survival?**

And secondly, and perhaps more important,

- **Where does the future lie for those members of the adult community who want and need to take the more gentle route back to learning?**

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